

United Engineering Company Shipyard,
Office and Firehouse
(Building No. 35T)
(Building No. 21)
2900 Main Street
Alameda
Alameda County
California

HAER No. CA-295-M

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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UNITED ENGINEERING COMPANY SHIPYARD, OFFICE AND FIREHOUSE
(Building No. 135T)
(Building No. 21)

HAER No. CA-295-M

Location: 2900 Main Street
Alameda
Alameda County
California

U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute Oakland West, Calif. quadrangle.
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10.562640.41842580

Significance: The office and firehouse is a contributing structure in the United Engineering Company Shipyard historic district that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The United Engineering Company Shipyard, established in 1941 to build and repair ships for the U.S. Navy, is the last surviving of several large World War II shipyards in Alameda. United Engineering built 21 tugboats and repaired hundreds of ships during the war. The facility was one of the largest employers in Alameda and played an important economic and social role in the city. This building played a supporting role in the shipyard and reflects the dangerous working conditions in the provision of a private, on-site firehouse.

Description: The office and firehouse is located just north of the large Inspection and Repair Shops building and south of the bending shops in the Alameda Gateway complex. The office and firehouse is a one-story rectangular-shaped building oriented east-west. It measures approximately 42 feet across the north and south sides and 37 feet across the east and west ends. The structure has a total area of about 1,554 square feet. Building 135T is rather plain in appearance, but unlike many of the buildings constructed at the yards from 1941 to 1945, the office and firehouse has some ornamentation. Exposed rafters and brackets under the windows are similar to details on a Craftsman bungalow.

Building 21 rests on a foundation of wood posts. The building is composed of a wood-frame structural system covered with horizontal wood V-groove siding on the exterior. There is a two-part addition across the back of the building that also has a frame structure but is covered with corrugated metal siding and plywood. The roof over the main part of the building is gabled with a low pitch and is covered with asphalt rolled strip roofing. The rear additions have shed roofs covered with corrugated metal. There is a small vent on the main roof.

Most windows are double-hung with wooden sashes. Several doorways have the original half-glassed wooden doors, but others have been replaced with wood hollow core doors or plywood. The garage doors on the east side of the building appear to be original.

Building 21 has been substantially altered on the interior and as a result has a complicated floor plan. The building is divided into three parts, each accessible only from the exterior. The rear of the building (the two rooms labeled "Storage" on the plan) has doors on the east and west ends. The front of the building is divided into a larger section on the west end and a smaller section on the east end. The larger section has two rooms (labeled "Marine Canvas Shop" on the plan) with two exterior doors on the south side and one on the west end. The smaller section has three rooms (labeled "Office" on the plan), each accessible from a door on the east end of the building. The walls and ceiling are covered with painted plywood. The floors are covered in linoleum tiles. The building has electricity and a gas furnace.

Close to the time of construction, in 1944, the building had an "L" shaped plan. Since that time the interior angle has been filled and shed additions added across the back the length of the building. The materials and workmanship of the additions is similar to other buildings constructed in the shipyard in the 1940s and 1950s and is likely from that period.

In the interior, the wall that divided what were the boiler maker's locker room and ship fitter's locker room was mostly removed, and a hallway open to the exterior was added to the east end of the building.

Aside from the alterations to the interior and the additions to the rear the building is intact and appears to be in good condition.

Historical Context:

The office and firehouse was built in the early 1940s during a construction campaign by United Engineering. The company quickly built numerous buildings to accommodate shipbuilding and repair necessitated by U.S. involvement in World War II.

Building 135T was generically called a "portable building" but its purpose was to house firefighting equipment and personnel that served the entire shipyard. Shortly after it was constructed at a cost of \$2,575.00, in October of 1944, plans were drawn for revisions to the building although it is not clear what the changes were. The plans show that the main section of the building was divided into a grid of six rooms. The largest rooms on the west end were a "boiler maker's locker room" and a "ship fitter's locker." In the middle there was a

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"work shop" and a "material's checkers." On the east end there was an office for the "fire chief" and "O. MacGregor's office." At the east end of the back of the building (the north side) there was a long space used for housing the "fire engine."

On the Sanborn Map of 1948, this building was labeled no. 22P. In 1970, the Alameda County Recorder listed this building as no. 43. Sometime during the ownership of Todd Shipyards Corporation, this came to be known as building no. 135.

A 1940s fire truck, possibly one formerly stored in the firehouse, is located to the east of the bending shops, north of this building. A sail making business called the "Marine Canvas Shop" currently occupies the building.

Sources:

Alameda County Recorder. Exhibit B: Description of Buildings, Waterfront Improvements, Shipyard Utilities, Machinery and Equipment. 18 February 1970. RE: 2568, IM 80-82.

Alameda Gateway. *Existing Site Plan*. 30 January 1984.

Alterations to a Portable Building. Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co., Ltd., Alameda Shipyard, 2 October 1944.

Kennedy, Clyde C., Engineering Office of. "Area Plan and Interceptor Profile: Improvements to Sewer System for Properties Occupied by Todd Shipyards Corp., Alameda, Calif." Prepared for Matson - United Properties, Inc. 9 August 1951.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Alameda, California*, p. 93. New York: 1948.

Thompson, Richard G., Lieutenant Colonel, San Francisco District, Corps of Engineers. Letter to Cherilyn Widell, State Historic Preservation Officer, requesting Determination of Eligibility. 30 April 1998.

United Engineering Company Ltd. Memo to Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks. "Reproduction Costs and Market Value to Third Parties of 'Civil Works'", with Estimated Schedule of "Civil Works" Facilities. 8 February 1946.

United States. Army Corps of Engineers - San Francisco District and California. State Historic Preservation Officer. Memorandum of Agreement Regarding the Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvements

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Project, Alameda County, California. Signed 31 January 2001 and 22 January 2001.

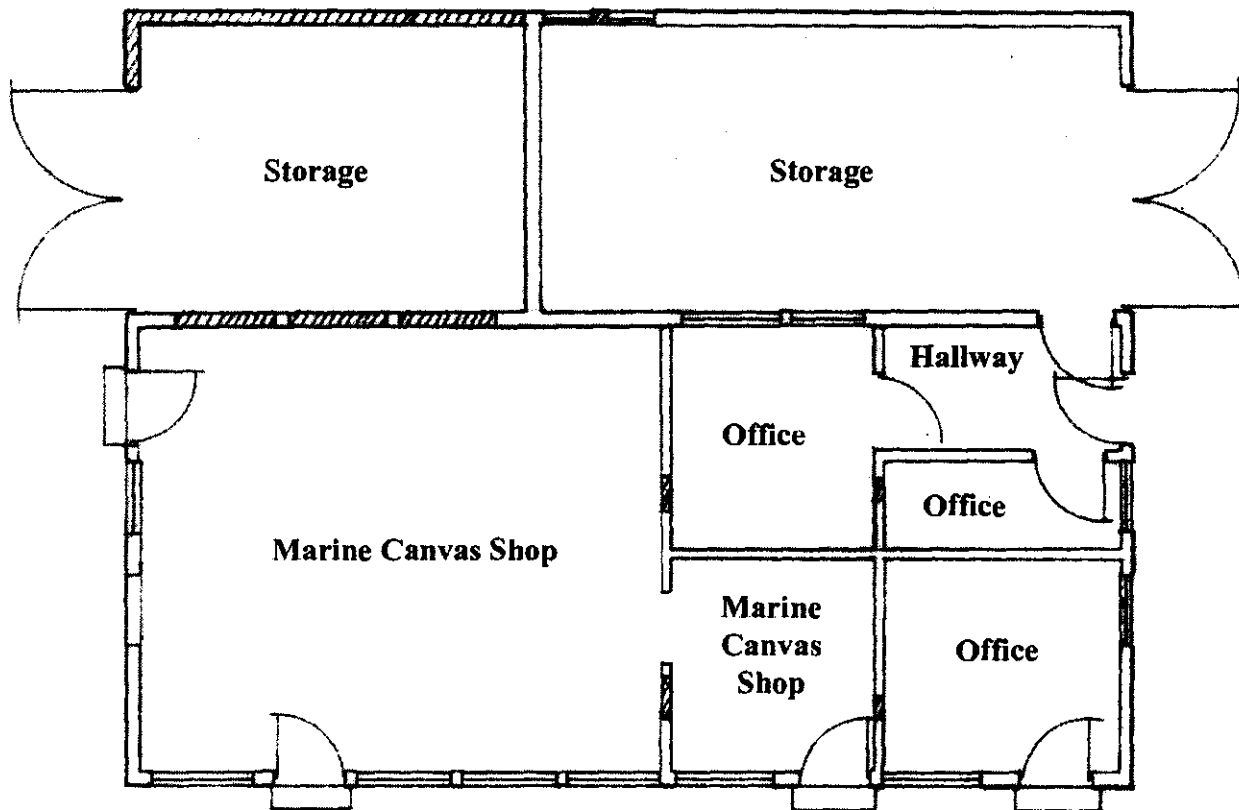
Widell, Cheryl, State Historic Preservation Officer. Letter to Richard G. Thompson, Lieutenant Colonel, San Francisco District, Corps of Engineers, Regarding Oakland Harbor Ship Channel Deepening and Improvements, Alameda County [Determination of Eligibility Concurrence]. 9 June 1998.

Project Information: This report was prepared for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Port of Oakland in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District and the California State Historic Preservation Officer concerning the former United Engineering Company shipyard. The Port of Oakland and the City of Alameda were concurring parties to the MOA. The MOA was created because of a proposal by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers in partnership with the Port of Oakland to sponsor the Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvements Project. This project "would deepen Oakland Harbor channels and berth areas from -42 feet mean lower low water (MLLW) to -50 feet MLLW, with 2 feet overdredge allowance" and widen some portions of the channels. These actions, which would constitute an Undertaking under Section 106, would result in the demolition of several buildings and structures at the former United Engineering Company Shipyard. Because the shipyard had been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the Undertaking would have an adverse effect on the property. Under the MOA, the following HAER documentation has been prepared: a written historic and descriptive report on the shipyard as a whole, seventeen separate reports on individual buildings and structures in the shipyard, including this report, and photographic documentation.

This building will not be demolished by the federal undertaking.

This report was prepared by Jody Stock, architectural designer, and Michael R. Corbett, architectural historian. Corbett was a subcontractor to Basin Research Associates of San Leandro. Basin Research was under contract to g. borchard & associates.

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BUILDING NO. 21: OFFICE AND FIREHOUSE



NORTH



0 2 4 8 12 feet

prepared by Jody R. Stock
12/5/00

*Plan is based on scaled drawing, *Alterations to a Portable Building* (Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co., Ltd., Alameda Shipyard, 2 October 1944.) The plan has been altered to reflect current field conditions. Walls which have been added after the 1944 plan are indicated with hashmarks and are not to scale.